

Name: _____ Date: _____ Period: _____

Edna Lewis, Chef and Writer



One of the greatest pleasures of my life has been that I have never stopped learning about Good Cooking and Good Food.

It is important to remember where you come from and the traditions that have been handed down from generation to generation. Edna Lewis realized this fact and made sure to leave a lasting legacy, or gift to her family and thousands of people in the United States by recording and teaching others about Southern Cooking.

Edna Lewis was born in 1916 in Virginia. She grew up in a community of emancipated, or freed slaves, along with her seven siblings. The people in this community grew and gathered their own food. They cooked on a wood-burning stove and measured out baking soda and salt on coins.

Edna left Virginia at the age of 16, after her father passed away. She headed first to Washington DC and then went to New York City. Her first job was working in laundry, ironing clothes. She had never ironed before and was fired just three hours later. She soon found a job as a seamstress and sewed dresses for ladies in New York City.

Edna worked many different jobs, but she dreamed of opening a restaurant and being a chef. In 1949, Edna's dream came true. Along with her friend, John Nicholson, she opened Café Nicholson. The restaurant served French food, but Edna also cooked southern dishes from

her childhood. Edna was the head chef at the restaurant for three years.

After leaving the restaurant, Edna became a lecturer for the American Museum of Natural History. She also worked as a private caterer.

But Edna had another dream that she wanted to come true. She wanted to bring fresh, seasonal foods to homes throughout America. Edna knew she could do this by writing a cookbook. In 1972, Edna became one of the first African Americans to publish a cookbook under her name. Prior to this, publishers left off names so that readers would not know the gender or race of the authors. Then in 1976, Edna published another cookbook. It was called *The Taste of Country Cooking*. This cookbook was different. Along with her recipes, Edna included memories of her childhood in Virginia, southern traditions, the heritage of African Americans, Juneteenth, and Emancipation Day celebrations.

Edna Lewis won many awards and honors throughout her career. In 1996 she was awarded an honorary Ph.D. in Culinary Arts from Johnson & Wales University. In 2014 Edna was celebrated on a U.S. postage for her contributions to cooking.

Edna Lewis retired to Georgia and died in 2006 at the age of 89.

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One of the greatest pleasures of my life has been that I have never stopped learning about food, cooking and food stories.

1. How does the sentence, “It is important to remember where you come from and the traditions that have been handed down from generation to generation” connect with Edna’s cookbook, *The Taste of Country Cooking*?

2. What inference can you make from the following excerpt: “Her first job was working in laundry ironing clothes. She had never ironed before and was fired just three hours later”?

3. Why do you think that publishers didn’t want readers to know the gender or ethnicity of cookbook authors?

4. What details from the passage support the fact that Edna Lewis was proud of her heritage?
